

**LANDPOWER  
AND AMBIGUOUS WARFARE:  
THE CHALLENGE OF COLOMBIA  
IN THE 21st CENTURY**

**Conference Report**

**Richard Downes**

**March 10, 1999**

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**19990716 066**

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## **FOREWORD**

On December 10 and 11, 1998, over 100 scholars, civilian government officials, and military officers from the United States, Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Panama and Mexico gathered at the U.S. Army War College to discuss "Landpower and Ambiguous Warfare: The Challenge of Colombia in the 21st Century." While the conference adopted no resolutions or conclusions, it provided a valuable forum for expressing widely differing viewpoints on critical components of Colombia's security situation.

The meeting highlighted the urgency of the Colombian crisis and the need for a comprehensive response by Colombia, the United States, and the regional community of nations. Much of the dialogue developed the principal subthemes of the conference: the sources of violence; the role of the guerrillas, paramilitaries, and narcotraffickers; the institutional capabilities and responses of the Colombian government and armed forces; and the role of the United States. Here, there was sharp disagreement among the participants, with some arguing in favor of an increased U.S. counternarcotics and/or counterinsurgency role and others emphasizing the priority of the peace process.

This report, by Dr. Richard Downes, summarizes the issues addressed and the major concerns of the attendees. The Strategic Studies Institute is pleased to offer the monograph as a contribution to the national security debate on Colombia within the United States and abroad.

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RICHARD DOWNES is Adjunct Professor of National Security at the Center for Hemispheric Defense Studies and Adjunct Senior Research Associate at the North-South Center of the University of Miami. A graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy, he holds the M.A. in Latin American Studies from the University of Florida, and the doctorate in History from the University of Texas at Austin. During his 23-year military career, he served in public affairs, education and training, and politico-military affairs. He served as politico-military planner on Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay, Venezuela, and international economic issues in the Strategic Plans and Policy Directorate of the Joint Staff. Dr. Downes was awarded numerous U.S. military decorations as well as the Santos Dumont Medal of Merit from the Government of Brazil. His writings focus on inter-American security, conflict resolution, civil-military relations, Brazil, Panama, Mexico, as well as Ecuador and Peru. Among his recent publications are: *The Impact of the End of the Cold War on Inter-American Relations: The Search for Paradigm and Principle*, *Emerging Patterns of Security Cooperation in the Americas*, and *New Security Relations in the Americas*. He is editor with Keith Rosenn of the forthcoming book, *Corruption and Political Reform in Brazil*, and coauthor and coeditor with Gabriel Marcella of *Security Cooperation in the Americas: Resolving the Ecuador-Peru Conflict* (forthcoming 1999).

## **LANDPOWER AND AMBIGUOUS WARFARE: THE CHALLENGE OF COLOMBIA IN THE 21st CENTURY**

### **What's at Stake in Colombia.**

There was an implicit recognition that Colombia's current situation has reached crisis proportions, with dire consequences for Colombian citizens, their government, neighboring nations, and the United States. While violence has been an important constant in Colombia's recent past, its increased tempo and scope since the early 1980s have edged Colombia toward a political abyss of civil war and the partial collapse of the state. The difficulties inherent in arranging for peace among combatants, while satisfying the interests of multiple national and international actors, seem to be overwhelming policymakers. After reviewing Colombian government efforts to attain peace, one prominent Colombian political figure asked: "How can we do more?" This, even as various academic analysts highlighted their doubts about the effectiveness and intent of various Colombian government programs and another alleged an "ideological agreement" between Colombia's armed forces and paramilitary outlaws. Others debated the relevancy of various historical examples of conflict resolution and the relative importance of the battlefield situation to the peace process. Discussions of U.S. policy toward Colombia highlighted the U.S. priority on combating narcotics trafficking from both affirmative and critical perspectives.

Conference dialogue dramatized the overwhelmingly negative dimensions of the current conflict. Former U.S. Ambassador to Colombia Myles Frechette cited the threats to Colombia's democracy and economy presented by the combination of a weak justice system, corruption incited by illegal drug trafficking, and continual violence generated by

narcotraffickers, paramilitary groups, and 15,000 to 20,000 guerrillas arrayed in three armies on 100 fronts. Violence ordered by narcotraffickers kills judges and senior government officials, and intimidates legislators into defeating or weakening the government's ability to confront crime. Another former State Department official pointed out that the international community does not appreciate the extent of Colombia's human tragedy, with four times the number of people killed over the past 8 years in Colombia than in the Balkans. The ongoing rural to urban migration, in the opinion of one analyst, is the greatest in the world in the last 10 years and comparable to events in Rwanda and Bosnia. By his count, between 900,000 and 1 million persons have been internally displaced in Colombia. "Hyper-violence," marked by 30,000 murders per year and a total collapse of penal justice, has superseded the capacity of the state to deal with crimes. Even though the state is far from disappearing, it has responded by engaging in illegal activities that include social cleansing by the police and a host of illegitimate actions by other state actors.

Another response has been the rise of independent, illegal armed groups known as "paramilitaries," which originated as self-defense organizations and are growing in numbers and power. They are dedicated to eliminating the guerrillas by indirect and vicious attacks. Particularly troubling, in the judgment of Professor Gustavo Gallón, a visiting researcher at the University of Notre Dame's Kellogg Institute, are murders of noncombatants—political activists, trade unionists, peasant activists, human rights workers, and ordinary citizens—overwhelmingly at the hand of paramilitary groups. In the judgment of the Commander of Colombia's Armed Forces, Army General Fernando Tapias Stahelin, massacres committed by the paramilitaries and guerrillas are polarizing the country and raising the specter of civil war. Despite "heroic" efforts to combat the drug trade, Colombia now produces 80 percent of the world's cocaine and at least 50 percent of the heroin seized on the U.S. East Coast. In recent years, rural order

has broken down, the area under guerrilla control has expanded, and a national economic crisis has ensued from the fall in prices of Colombia's oil exports. While attempting to be optimistic about recent events, a senior Colombian military officer noted that narcotrafficking continues to generate nearly \$500 million per year in revenue for the guerrilla forces.

In a paper written for the conference, former Foreign Minister of Colombia Noemí Sanín maintains that the problem is systemic. The political system, she argues, is undemocratic because it denies "participation . . . to different expressions of thought . . ." Moreover, the political parties have "failed to respond to the actual problems of the country: violence, poverty, impunity, corruption, and lack of education and health services."

The economic and political costs of Colombia's internal struggles are painfully apparent to Colombia's neighbors. In the opinion of a senior military officer, Colombian guerrillas have taken advantage of weak vigilance on its borders to acquire military supplies and precursor chemicals for drug processing. Panama is forced to "bend in the wind" because it is unable to prevent use of its territory and harassment of its population in the Darién region by guerrillas, paramilitaries, and common criminals seeking supplies and relaxation. Colombian self-defense groups have killed at least 10 people in Panama, and hundreds of displaced Colombians have sought refuge across the porous border. The Panamanian government has responded with the creation of a border police force of 1,200 and a \$88 million integral development plan. In the judgment of journalist Berta Thayer, however, the country's border with Colombia remains thoroughly permeable and impossible to control. Drug traffickers continue using Panamanian territory, and money-launderers, smugglers, and illegal arms traffickers also use it as an operational base.

Ecuador feels threatened as well. It currently hosts 350,000 Colombian citizens, many of whom are illegal

immigrants, and their presence is related to rising crime rates and especially bank robberies, in the opinion of Colonel Luis Hernández of the Ecuadorian army. Cross-border attacks originating in Colombia have claimed the lives of 20 Ecuadorian soldiers and police officers. In response to the nearby violence, Ecuador has increased its military presence in the jungle region along the border, and the Ecuadorian military carries out combined operations with local Colombian military commanders. There is no central coordination, though, and Colonel Hernández envisions more military operations in the border region and increased illegal immigration if Colombia's peace negotiations fail. Violence on the Colombian border has replaced the Peruvian issue as Ecuador's premier security challenge.

Mexico fears the "Colombianization" of its own political process because of the influence of narcotraffickers and the reproduction of Colombian political forms within its own borders. Caught in the middle between producing and consuming countries, Mexico's function as a transshipment area has created strongly negative pressures on its already weakened state and social structures. The security and justice systems are especially vulnerable, with a decided lack of continuity in the leadership of the Attorney General's office. According to Professor Raul Benítez of the National Autonomous University of Mexico, 80 percent of Mexico's police commanders are tied to the cartels. Mexican criminal organizations are joining forces with members of the Russian mafia and Colombian drug traffickers, especially in the Yucatán peninsula. This difficult situation requires international collaboration at far higher levels than those currently reached, while even existing ties are weakened by a mutual lack of trust and confidence. Peace in Colombia is essential to confronting the threats arising from narcotrafficking.

Venezuela also has incurred heavy costs arising from Colombia's crisis. It has been forced to absorb nearly three million Colombian immigrants and to confront drug-



trafficking, kidnapping, blackmail, bribery, car theft, smuggling, cattle rustling, and the attack and harassment of its military units on the Colombian border. "Achieving peace in Colombia is of fundamental importance to Venezuela," declared retired Venezuela Air Force General Boris Saavedra. Security threats emanating from Colombia have forced Venezuela to extensively increase its military presence in the border regions and may even place in jeopardy the expansion of trade and investment between the two countries. Control by the "narcoguerrillas" of segments of Colombian territory would have a serious impact on bilateral relations. In his opinion, the narco-guerrilla problem "is rapidly becoming a hemispheric security problem because it affects all areas of society" and must be included in the agendas of international agencies, regional and global.

Colombia's problems jeopardize the United States in multiple ways. The impact of the drug industry has been devastating on U.S. society. Annual U.S. imports of 300 million tons of cocaine, 70 percent of Colombian origin, have caused 100,000 deaths and \$300 billion in costs in the last 10 years. Cocaine imports feed the habits of 12 million drug users in the United States, including 3.6 million addicts, contribute to 14,000 drug-related deaths per year, and lead to untold economic costs for health care, public safety, and the loss of productivity. Because of the surge in arrests related to drugs, one of every 155 U.S. citizens is incarcerated. More U.S. citizens are behind bars than serving in the armed forces. Colombia's illegal drug trade constitutes a national security threat to the United States, and its internal violence has resulted in the kidnapping of several U.S. citizens. The 25,000 U.S. citizens living in Colombia endure varying degrees of risk because of the internal situation. Economically, Colombia serves as a major market for U.S. exports, and 41 percent of Colombia's exports are destined for the United States. Two-way U.S.-Colombian trade is 60 percent higher than U.S.-Chilean trade, four times that of the U.S. trade with the

countries of former Yugoslavia, and 400 of the Fortune 500 companies operate in Colombia. The United States is the leading source of foreign investment. From the U.S. perspective, the current environment raises serious doubts about Colombia's political and economic future.

### **A Series of Troubling Issues.**

Implicit agreements on the seriousness of the challenges to Colombia's democracy and to the security of neighboring states masked widely differing positions on a series of issues. Major disagreements became evident on the relationship between drug trafficking and systemic violence, the roles of the armed forces and police in combating that violence, a proper role for the United States, and the components and mechanics of the peace process. True to the conference's title, "ambiguous warfare" inherently makes building a consensus on who is the enemy and a proper strategy to defeat him an exceedingly complex task.

*The Relationship between Illegal Drug Trafficking and Systemic Violence.* Two antagonistic interpretations arose concerning the relationship between narcotrafficking and the systemic violence plaguing the country. One holds that the narcotraffickers are the primary generators of the violence; the other posits that violence represents a response to a breakdown in political consensus and to dysfunctional social practices. The commander of Colombia's armed forces, Army General Fernando Tapias Stahelin, placed the blame squarely on narcotrafficking. He explained that the armed forces' recognition of the relationship between trafficking and violence has led them to make the interruption of the links between the narcotraffickers and the guerrillas the primary military objective. The director of Colombia's national police, General José Serrano, credits narcotrafficking with providing both the guerrillas and the paramilitaries with the economic resources to support their violence. A former

Colombian official supported this view by claiming that 70 percent of the combat power of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) derives from controlling narcotrafficking activities. Thus, the traffickers and the FARC, by implication, have vested interests in sustaining the ongoing domestic conflict. In the opinion of R. Rand Beers, Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics Matters and Law Enforcement, over the past several years the union between narcotraffickers and guerrillas has become more evident than ever. Also lending some support to this interpretation were comments by Professor Marc Chernick of Georgetown University, who noted that Colombia's violence has changed in nature and actors since the 1940s. While similarities exist with previous periods, the insertion of Colombia into the world economy of narcotrafficking is one reason for the worsening situation and has fueled much of the conflict.

Others raised doubts about the degree of dependency between the narcotraffickers and the guerrillas or paramilitaries. A statement by Colombian Minister of Defense Rodrigo Lloreda that the FARC charges the narcotraffickers taxes of \$500 million per year was subsequently challenged by a researcher who argued that the figure represented a tentative estimate. A representative of a nongovernmental organization stated that it was not clear how the guerrillas actually tax the narcotraffickers. Marc Chernick argued that "narco-guerrillas" is a misnomer. In his opinion, the guerrillas are fundamentally political, not essentially a drug cartel, and use criminal activities used to finance war, building an army in the process. Further questioning the extent of guerrilla dependence upon narcotrafficking was Professor Nazih Richani of George Washington University. He stated that the FARC presence in areas under its control preceded coca cultivation by decades, and that it receives less than 40 percent of its income from narcotrafficking. He explained that the guerrillas have successfully expanded their power since the 1980s by focusing on "large landowners, large

cattle ranchers, the commercial bourgeoisies, and multinationals," in addition to taxing coca growers. Between 1991 and 1995, they increased their presence in the nation's municipalities by 44 percent, achieving a presence in over half of Colombia's 1,094 municipalities. Similarly, Daniel García-Peña of the Woodrow Wilson Center maintained that even though the guerrillas tax the drug trade, they are not narcotraffickers. He argued that narcotrafficking is a phenomenon involving multiple actors that fuels violent as well as seemingly legitimate businesses throughout Colombia. Though some elements of the paramilitaries are engaged in narcotrafficking and there is a "tortured history" of ties between the drug traffickers and paramilitaries, David Spencer of George Washington University maintained that the extent of the current paramilitaries' dependence on narcotrafficking is not clear. Since the conference did not explore the issue of the narcotraffickers as a separate entity (or entities), no clear image emerged of the extent of their dependence upon guerrilla, paramilitary, or other armed resources.

Further doubts were raised about whether the guerrillas themselves, regardless of the extent of their ties to the narcotraffickers, were primarily responsible for the violent state of Colombia. A former U.S. ambassador credited the insurgents with responsibility for 23 percent of the killings and 50 percent of the kidnappings experienced by Colombian society. Professor Francisco Thoumi of the University of the Andes placed even less blame at the guerrillas' feet, observing that only 10 to 15 percent of murders could be explained by political violence, the rest being "socially-driven." Thoumi stood the previous argument on its head by stating that it was the weakness of the Colombian state that explained the growth of drug trafficking. This industry is not explained by economic forces, he reasoned, since most countries that could produce drugs, such as India, Thailand, or Indonesia, choose not to do so. Rather, its rise is due to several factors: the weakness of the state, derived from a fragmented, patrimonial, and

clientelistic political system; the level of impunity compared with possible profits; and the general breakdown in social controls. The latter includes a lack of consensus about property and property rights that makes kidnapping merely a transfer payment. Colombians are continuing the search for "El Dorado" initiated during the Spanish Conquest and employing systematic corruption, marked by pay-offs at the local level to facilitate illicit activities. Corruption and drugs have generated an interactive process wherein the drug industry has become a catalyst for corruption affecting the political system in unprecedented ways. Generally supporting his observations was Eduardo Pizarro of the National University of Colombia, who argued that the Colombian state had undergone a partial collapse since 1989, marked by its loss of monopoly over legitimate violence in the face of high indices of criminality and impunity, the absence of state presence in many regions, and the burdens of two wars: one against the guerrillas, and the other against narcotrafficking.

*The Roles of the Armed Forces and Police in Combating Colombian Violence.* Equally divergent were views about the roles of the armed forces and police in sustaining democracy by combating the current violence. Colombian military and police representatives were highly defensive of recent measures undertaken to develop an effective strategy to combat narcotraffickers, guerrillas, and paramilitary groups. Others were strongly critical of the army and police, arguing that they tacitly supported paramilitary groups and misguidedly attacked peasants growing coca, while ignoring the true drug traffickers who live in cities.

In the view of the Colombian army, the last 10 years' confrontations have brought the nation to the brink of civil war and ecological devastation. Even though army and police units have killed over 700 paramilitary and guerrilla fighters and captured another 29,755, insurgent activity is causing an annual \$1 billion loss in oil revenues, paramilitary participation has increased, and the Putumayo

region near the Ecuadorian border has fallen under guerrilla control. The armed forces and police suffered over 600 casualties in the latest year of fighting. Neighboring countries are allowing the narcotraffickers to launder money, and the current state of law (as opposed to a state of emergency) is more appropriate for a state at peace instead of one engaged in an armed struggle with various subversive groups. Meanwhile, the armed forces have been subjected to unjustified criticism of the military justice system.

Nevertheless, in their view, the armed forces have registered progress by bringing the paramilitaries under control and decreasing FARC revenues, while respecting human rights and international law. The armed forces have adopted an offensive stance and are engaging the paramilitaries. They have recently killed 35 members of paramilitary groups and brought another 230 to justice. David Spencer shared the Colombian military's perspective on this issue, pointing out that even though both use weapons against a common enemy, army and police actions have hurt the paramilitaries. While there may have been personal links between some army officers and paramilitaries at the brigade commander level in the past and retired officers and former soldiers have joined the paramilitary groups, officers who have not responded to the paramilitary threat have been indicted. The paramilitaries are gathering strength not from state assistance, but because they are effective at terminating petty crime and restoring order, and thus have gained the support of large landowners, fishermen, cattlemen, drug traffickers, and other elements who felt victimized by the guerrillas. Army action also caused FARC revenues to fall by several million dollars in 1997. The armed forces have installed 115 human rights officers and transferred between 300 and 400 cases from military courts to civil justice, resulting in 57 convictions of armed forces' members. According to the Colombian Armed Forces Commander, the 230,000 members of the military and police have no links with death

squads, and evaluations of the armed forces' human rights performance should be based upon current information, not historical incidents.

Strategically, the armed forces are adopting an offensive attitude, interrupting the links between the narco-traffickers and the "generators of violence," combating all "generators of violence" by attacking guerrillas and paramilitaries with equal vigor, and strengthening relations with the civilian population while protecting it and the country's natural resources. They are combating the guerrillas' infrastructure support system and complementing the action of the police. Ongoing restructuring will increase the training and modernization of the armed forces by replacing with professional soldiers 15,000 of 35,000 high school graduate soldiers (*bachilleres*) who are prohibited by law from entering combat. The Colombian air and marine forces are also participating in the destruction of the drug infrastructure, and the armed forces as a whole are enhancing their mobility, communications, and intelligence capabilities, preparing themselves for action in the event of the failure of the peace process. The creation of a special counternarcotics battalion will complement the anti-drug activities of the national police.

The national police remain engaged in fumigating illegal crops, destroying drug labs, combating money laundering, destroying clandestine landing strips, and controlling jails where some drug leaders are kept. Police Director General José Serrano credits his forces with fumigating 60,000 hectares, thereby preventing increased drug cultivation, confiscating 20,000 properties worth \$2 billion, and destroying large trafficking organizations. His force is preparing to utilize six new Blackhawk helicopters authorized by the U.S. Congress to accelerate eradication of poppy crops.

Other conference participants questioned whether Colombia's armed forces are using effective and legitimate means to secure legitimate ends. One U.S. civilian academic

charged the Colombian military with participation or acquiescence in the illegal activities of the paramilitaries. Another charged the state with complicity in illegal violence, and claimed that human rights violations by military officers were continuing. Some officers with records of human rights violations apparently remain within the Colombian armed forces. The head of the Office of Andean Affairs at the U.S. Department of State, Phillip Chicola, noted that shuffling senior officers with a record of human rights "problems" from one unit to another was an insufficient remedy and made collaboration difficult. A Colombian academic suggested that the armed forces' tactics targeting the population from helicopters could be counterproductive, leading to human rights violations and generating even more conflict. In his opinion, human rights violations must be monitored independently, given that current steps to improve the human rights situation are ambiguous and their results uncertain. He advocated adoption of a human rights policy that would advance peace, such as the creation of a special mechanism for truth and justice, as has occurred in other nations in the region. Only confrontation with paramilitary groups, dismissal of state agents engaged in human rights violations, and an end to impunity will be effective, he argued.

*A Proper Role for the United States.* Discussions of the U.S. role engendered multiple and often contradictory observations. The host of the conference, Army War College Commandant Major General Robert Scales, challenged conference participants to sharpen a definition of what U.S. assistance is needed for Colombia, even as he sounded a cautionary note, advising that sometimes assistance can be "counterproductive." Several members of the Clinton Administration's foreign policy community highlighted the current emphasis on counternarcotics, but academics, retired diplomats, and military officers questioned the rationale for such a policy and suggested alternative priorities.



According to Phillip Chicola, counternarcotics is the "centerpiece and most difficult and prominent issue of our bilateral relationship." This choice was apparently based upon practical and political reasons. Thomas Umberg of the Office of National Drug Control Policy said that placing counterdrugs at the center of the U.S.-Colombian relationship confronts a national security threat emanating from Colombia and supports the President's drug strategy, especially goals four and five that call for shielding America's air, land, and sea frontiers from the drug threat and breaking the foreign and domestic drug supply sources. R. Rand Beers noted that this strategy has four major goals with respect to Colombia: 1) enhancement of the Government of Colombia's intelligence capability; 2) eradication and alternate development; 3) interdiction; and, 4) the strengthening of Colombian law enforcement agencies and the administration of justice. The United States recognizes the need for the Colombian government to regain control over the coca-growing areas, according to Umberg.

The United States believes it can effectively assist Colombian military and police, who are "at the heart of a solution." The amount of U.S. resources available to Colombia has increased significantly in 1998, with the passage of emergency supplemental funding that should allow Colombia to conduct a more successful counter-narcotics program. Coupled with regular appropriations, total U.S. funding for the current fiscal year has reached nearly \$300 million, and \$15 million is programmed to support alternative crop development over the next 3 years. According to Beers, this policy represents a consensus within the U.S. Government that would be placed at risk if the United States were to attempt to assume a counter-insurgency role. In fact, though, it appears that the United States recognizes that resources provided for counterdrug purposes are fungible. In the opinion of one member of the administration, if counterdrug efforts were to lead to conflict with guerrilla groups, then "so be it." However, U.S. Army Brigadier General James Parker of the U.S. Southern

Command noted that training for counterdrug actions differed from training for counterinsurgency because the former did not include training in artillery, close air support, or psychological operations.

In Chicola's opinion, the recent visit of President Pastrana to the United States opened the door for a broadening of the relationship. The United States is dedicated to working with the Colombian government, since there is no longer any need for the two sides to sit at opposite sides of the table on multiple issues where cooperation is possible. However, the Colombian government must deal effectively with the long record of human rights abuses allegedly committed by members of the Colombian military. In addition to counternarcotics and human rights, others include humanitarian relief, economic reform, access to investment and trade, environmental concerns, and a broad range of other areas. According to Chicola, progress has already been registered on economic issues, a high-level consultative commission has been established, and the presidential visit was an outstanding success. In his view, Colombia has "talked the talk," and now needs to implement its plans ("walk the walk"). The United States is prepared to cooperate in this process.

President Clinton has made it clear that peace in Colombia is the primary policy objective of the United States. Achieving peace would make the counternarcotics effort far more successful, reduce the "comfort level" of the FARC, and enhance the ability of the United States to trade and invest. However, Chicola argued that the peace process is "essentially a Colombian enterprise." The United States supports the process, but feels that peace should not come "at any price." In the U.S. view, any peace settlement must allow for continued counternarcotics efforts; it should not grant impunity to narcotraffickers, nor allow for the creation of a state within a state, nor overlook Colombia's international obligations.

The U.S. focus on counternarcotics was questioned by a variety of participants. Professor Caesar Sereseres of the University of California at Irvine expressed his view that unless guerrilla issues are also dealt with, U.S. drug policy would fail. He urged the United States to "get its act together" and focus on the battlefield in relation to the prospects for negotiation. Failure to do so, he said, is "utterly demoralizing" and "utterly confusing" to the Colombians. Totally contrary advice was offered by Cynthia Arnson of the Woodrow Wilson Center. While endorsing the administration's judgment that there was no consensus for supporting counterinsurgency activities in Colombia, she criticized U.S. policy for having contradictory objectives and for its emphasis on security issues. She applauded the State Department's greater emphasis on human rights and extension of the provisions of the Leahy Amendment. In her opinion, comments that "criticism of the Colombian military is unfair" overlook the "principal failure of U.S. policy," the absence of a policy with respect to the paramilitaries. She advocated vigorous movement against the paramilitaries because of their central threat to the state's authority. Daniel García Peña charged that U.S. policy actually helps the guerrillas by fumigating the peasants in the countryside and was "completely wrong." He argued that different points of view within U.S. policy circles were self-defeating, and that more emphasis should be dedicated to attaining peace. Michael Shifter of the Inter-American Dialogue urged the United States to give greater attention to Colombia at the "highest levels."

Several former U.S. Government officials also offered viewpoints differing widely from the administration. A former senior State Department official, Ambassador David Passage, charged that U.S. policy toward Colombia showed that the United States remains "politically haunted and legislatively crippled by ghosts in its past." He stated that the United States is precluded from training police forces, except in a very narrow sector, because of its inability to come to grips with the legacy of Vietnam and the murder of a

U.S. security adviser in Uruguay in 1971. He described the U.S. unwillingness to train the armed forces as "illogical and irrational," given the need for Colombia to regain control over its territory. He described U.S. national interests as actions by a "legitimate and democratic" Colombian government that would 1) determine Colombia's own policy and destiny; 2) exercise control over all its territory; 3) protect the human rights and civilian liberties of all its citizens; 4) act effectively against corruption; and, 5) commit itself to eliminating drug trafficking. Passage criticized the U.S. focus on counternarcotics as being excessively narrow and advocated U.S. assistance in providing simple training and doctrine in joint and small unit operations, night operations, and usable operational intelligence. He also urged assisting in a dramatic improvement in quick reaction forces and help for creation of an airborne strike force, better logistics supplies, improved repair capability and an increased spare parts inventory. In his view, such U.S. support could be accomplished at little cost through commitment of modest resources and small numbers of well-protected people.

Retired U.S. Army General Frederick Woerner, now of Boston University, urged U.S. policy to give priority emphasis to promoting 1) the furtherance of democracy; and 2) the reduction of the drug flow, supported by the provision of some resources. He recommended a subordinate role for the United States, focusing on planning, communications, intelligence, and mobility, while standing as an "unrelenting advocate" for human rights. Retired U.S. Ambassador Edwin G. Corr, now at the University of Oklahoma, termed the earlier U.S. policy decision to decertify Colombia a mistake because it failed to recognize Colombia's sacrifices. He argued that multiple sources of U.S. appropriations for foreign activities often lead to contradictory and cumbersome policy guidance, and stated that the United States needed to be able to assist Colombia's police while observing laws to the letter.

*The Components and Mechanics of the Peace Process.* Viewpoints on how to achieve peace in Colombia proved even more divergent. Several speakers commented that the situation in Colombia should be analyzed from a heavily comparative basis with an important military component, drawing upon the experiences of Vietnam and El Salvador. Others argued for the primacy of reforms within Colombia as the key to successful peace negotiations. Broad differences also existed as to whether and how the paramilitary forces should participate in the peace process.

Caesar Sereseres argued for greater attention to the political implications of the battlefield. He expressed his conviction that "what happens on the battlefield matters" by setting the context for incentives or disincentives for serious negotiations. He stated that historically most conflicts ended on the battlefield and highlighted three factors that he considered components of a pattern of success. Drawing from the experiences of Thailand, the Philippines, and Central America in the 1980s, he stressed the importance of: 1) the existence of a national campaign plan, indicating that civilian authorities have assumed responsibility for the success or failure of military forces on the battlefield; 2) recognition that counterinsurgency is not a cheap solution—that it demands financial and political commitments, including mobilization of the government and the civilian population; and, 3) an internal reform or reorganization of the armed forces to suit battlefield circumstances. The latter always involved a reorganization of the army and its intelligence structure and the creation of a special operations command and local defense forces. He argued that experience showed the need for armies to conduct a rigorous self-critique, to separate the guerrillas from the population, to link the battlefield to the negotiation process, to make the guerrilla infrastructure the primary target, and to "attrit" enough guerrillas to put the government in a good position to negotiate. Colombia's guerrillas, in his opinion, are dedicated to sustaining a *status quo* that allows them to operate a billion-dollar

business in permissive zones behind a "democratic shield." For them, total victory would ironically spell defeat. His comments were partially supported by General Fred Woerner, who has been analyzing the issue of defeating guerrillas in Colombia since 1962. Woerner sees no possibility of defeating guerrillas and doesn't see why they would negotiate if the armed forces are ready to cease operations against them. Retired Ambassador David Passage agreed. In the current situation, he knew of "nothing that would hold out hope for successful peace negotiations with respect to minimal Colombian goals."

Sereseres's assertions were challenged by others, who judged the military solution to have been tried and failed or who place less emphasis on military factors (though Sereseres maintains that he did not propose a military solution). Daniel García-Peña noted that Colombia already spends more than the average Latin American country on the military and that further strengthening the armed forces cannot be the solution, especially since it would leave the paramilitary question unanswered. Disagreeing with Sereseres, he stated that the guerrillas were attempting to overthrow the state and would not "lose if they win." Nor would they disavow their goals, even if severely weakened. He argued that the guerrillas want peace, but on their terms. The pressing need, in his opinion, was "to put on the table issues of a social and political nature that led to the uprising." Cynthia Arnson discounted the importance of the military situation in the resolution of the conflict in El Salvador. She argued that conditions could change, not just in response to military stimulus, but also as a function of the changing agendas and perceptions of the combatants. Colombian Minister of Defense Lloreda indicated that broad political support already exists for a peace settlement. He noted that 60 to 70 percent of Colombia's citizens favor negotiations and that a "Plan Colombia" has been prepared, to be financed by \$800 million in contributions over 2 years by the country's wealthiest taxpayers.

Marc Chernick also expressed the view that the conflict was not "winnable" through military means, and that a stalemate has arisen. The state cannot defeat the guerrillas, and the guerrillas cannot defeat the state. In his judgment, the only solution lay in a negotiated settlement that would be based upon a broad agenda. This would go beyond disarmament and re-incorporation to bring about major political reforms not possible through other means. He also envisioned the need for mediation and financial assistance from the international community since "peace will be expensive." Fundamental issues at the heart of war and peace, in his opinion, are reforms to advance the democratic process, preserving access to political power for former insurgents, resolving land disputes, and dealing with the lack of state presence in many areas never integrated into the state. He suggested that the peace process could be used to achieve control of the drug trade by placing the issue of illicit crops on the negotiating table, especially since the continual conflict jeopardizes the success of alternative forms of development. Also essential to the process is the dismantling of the paramilitaries, the establishment of the guerrillas' confidence in the government, and security for guerrillas at the local level through an institutionalization of their local political power. In dealings with the Ejército de Liberación Nacional, he urged attention to the issue of using oil revenues to promote agrarian reform and to make investments in rural areas. In his view, the central issue overall is how to rebuild the Colombian nation in the context of peace.

Disagreements were also apparent over how or whether to include the paramilitaries in the peace process. David Spencer noted that the paramilitary groups want the same recognition as the guerrillas and favor a nationally accepted political settlement, even as they practice extreme criminal measures to accomplish their goals. Moreover, they will not lay down arms before the guerrillas do the same. He has concluded that the paramilitaries are growing in strength, represent an alienated portion of society, and must be

included in the peace process. However, Daniel García-Peña questioned whether it was feasible to include the guerrillas and the paramilitaries in the same negotiations, and suggested exploring a parallel process that would disarm and dismantle the paramilitaries. Minister of Defense Lloreda pointed out that only three representatives from the FARC were given the special legal status that will allow them to participate in negotiations.

Reform of the armed forces could form part of the peace process, observed Rafael Pardo, former Colombian Minister of Defense and now a commentator for RCN Television. Pardo rejected the possibility of such reforms serving as a "down payment" for the peace process, since it would be irresponsible to attempt military reform in the midst of the conflict except to instill greater combat efficiency. Reform should not be driven by the end of the Cold War or by the supposed lack of conflicts in the region, since numerous land and maritime borders remain undefined in the Caribbean region. However, approaching the issue of how the military might be reformed in the post-conflict environment might advance thinking about any future negotiations regarding the military's structure. Reductions in the armed forces' size would inevitably follow the conflict's end, as would the issue of how to integrate regular and irregular forces. Efforts at resolving these questions could draw upon various national and international examples. In the process, the reform could reaffirm Colombia's democratic nature by separating the military from politics. Specific measures might include: 1) reviewing the problematical clause that charges the military with being "defenders of constitutional order"; 2) naming military commanders for a fixed term, instead of linking their destiny with civilian ministers of defense who are often replaced; and, 3) closely examining the issue of promotion by merit, a principle that should be viewed with caution because it could introduce political factors into the promotion process. Further, military reform should maintain the subordination of the armed forces to the executive and allow the military autonomy on internal



military matters, such as promotion and the general precepts of military strategy. Finally, it should allow the army to continue to be defined nationally, rather than by region or state. The armed forces should be able to retain their status as the institution with the second highest rating of confidence of the Colombian people. However, Pardo pointed to the dilemma arising from current legislation preventing use of high-school graduates in combat positions as risking the creation of an "army of the poor," unrepresentative of the Colombian nation.

### **Conclusion.**

This conference was designed, in the view of its host, Major General Robert Scales, to help "make strategic sense of a very complex country," but it far exceeded its goal. The issues addressed were ponderous, and answers to the questions raised led to vigorous discussions extending beyond the time available and overflowing into small groups and social gatherings. Some commented that it was the most intense conference they had attended in years. In the opinion of one participant, the organizers of the two-day session had served each attendee an "elephant for lunch" to be consumed one bite at a time. Those seeking to analyze Colombia's current situation were well-served by the depth of expertise and breadth of professional judgments presented. The challenges of dealing with the Colombian case of "landpower and ambiguous warfare" became clearer than ever.

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